



National Audit Office

Using communication to tackle theft from vehicles

A good practice guide



Produced in partnership with



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For further information about the National Audit Office please contact:

National Audit Office
Press Office
157-197 Buckingham Palace Road
Victoria, London
SW1W 9SP

Tel: 020 7798 7400

Email: enquiries@nao.gsi.gov.uk

About this guide

This guide, which was commissioned by the National Audit Office following its report on Reducing Vehicle Crime,¹ provides guidance for Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) and Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) on the most cost-effective channels for communicating with the public, reminding them of what they can do to minimise the risk of being a victim of vehicle crime, but also seeking to deter people from becoming theft-from-vehicle offenders.

There is no one “theft from motor vehicles” (TFMV) problem in England and Wales. The extent and types of crime vary from one area to another. Partnerships, too, vary in composition and budget. What may be appropriate and affordable for one CDRP may not be for another. In setting out a wide range of good practice, the aim is to provide a “bank” of good ideas on which CDRPs may wish to draw to help reduce theft from vehicle crime.

Introduction



1. This guide is based on the results of research undertaken by an independent social research agency, Carol Goldstone Associates in April / May 2007. Through examining the range of initiatives in use in a sample of CDRPs, the aim was to identify whether any methods were particularly effective in reducing TFMV or addressing certain types of crime overall. The research involved examination of the range of initiatives in use in a sample of 40 CDRPs and CSPs in England and Wales. The sample was structured to include: some which had been particularly successful in reducing the rate of “theft from” crimes, and some reporting less significant reductions; geographical location (urban/rural etc) and various demographics, including ethnicity and employment levels. Between two and seven partnerships were interviewed in each English Government Office region and Wales.
2. CDRPs/CSPs showing the most effective multi-agency working not only involve **strategic** partners, but also **operational** partners, including voluntary and community groups, for the effective delivery of their messages. Messages that are locally badged, particularly by organisations that the community readily identify with and trust, are very powerful. The insight into the community, and access to the general public, that such groups have, can be invaluable in getting the message across to local people.
3. The **key finding** was that no one crime prevention initiative will work alone. Communicating crime prevention messages works best when supported by consistent effort at preventing and detecting theft from vehicle crime. The most effective way forward seems to be a

constant rolling programme of a range of initiatives, preferably involving a multi-agency approach.

4. This guide addresses the following:
 - Defining the local TFMV problem
 - National and local communication channels
 - Communication activity on varying budgets (free / low / medium / high).



Analysing the local TFMV problem

5. Before deciding how best to tackle prevention and detection of TFMV crime, CDRPs/CSPs must first work with their partner organisations to research and understand local factors which may be contributing to TFMV crime. The British Crime Survey² gives a clear picture of the overall national trends in the nature of theft from vehicles, but the research showed that there were variations locally, confirming the importance of CDRPs/CSPs analysing local data and trends.

Factors which they should consider include:

- Are some areas/roads/car parks more prone to TFMV than others? Why? Why not others?
- Are certain items particularly prone to theft from vehicles in specific localities?
- Are individual offenders or groups renowned for local TFMV, and where are they now (in the community, in prison, due to be released shortly etc)?
- What prevention and detection methods have been tried locally, and at what cost, and how successful were they?

Did you know?

Hotspot locations for vehicle crimes

British Crime Survey data (2005/06):

- street (outside home)
- outside areas of premises and garages or car parks around but not connected to the home
- car parks
- streets
- work car parks/streets
- home

Additional information from CDRP research (2007)³:

- town centre car parks
- shopping centres
- areas with high population of prolific areas;
- residential estates known for high crime rates
- affluent areas

NB hot spots can be transient

Most frequently mentioned **items stolen** from vehicles are:

British Crime Survey data (2005/06):

- Exterior fittings
- Car radios
- Valuables (jewellery, handbags, purses/wallets, cash, credit cards, clothes)
- CDs, DVDs, videos, tapes,
- Tools
- Mobile phones
- Wheels
- Electrical equipment
- Other vehicle parts

Additional information from CDRP research (2007)⁴:

- Satellite Navigation
- Sports equipment
- Laptops
- Jackets
- Mobile phones
- Car stereos, Ipods
- Tax discs/Blue Badges
- Shopping
- Number plates

Communication channels

6. Because of the diversity of crime in different localities, the focus is now increasingly on CDRPs /CSPs developing strategies which are best tailored to local problems or factors and financial resources available to them. In general, people know that they should lock their cars, avoid leaving vulnerable items in cars and certainly not on display – but they don't perceive themselves as potential victims of crime. They may be more likely to respond to publicity which identifies specific roads/local hotspots that they recognise. Research also suggests that reporting what has been done to tackle vehicle crime can be more effective in reducing crime than messages reminding them of the need to take preventative action⁵.

7. The CDRPs/CSPs sampled were using a wide range of methods to communicate vehicle crime prevention messages:

- the local police (including officers going door to-door offering information and advice to residents);
- local councils and political organisations;
- voluntary groups (including Neighbourhood Watch schemes, whereby incidences of vehicle crime or hotspots are identified in newsletters or briefings which co-ordinators forward to member households);
- community groups (such as residents' or tenants' associations for them to include prevention of crime messages in local newsletters, or at resident group forums);

- car park providers (not only distributing CDRP messages, but also feeding intelligence back to the police).
8. In devising a rolling programme of cost-effective prevention and detection techniques, CDRPs may wish to consider promoting messages through:
- local radio;
 - local newspapers – articles as well as advertisements;
 - tenants' and residents' associations;
 - faith-based groups;
 - local community organisations (including voluntary groups);
 - libraries and other community services;
 - local Chambers of Commerce;
 - individual retail units (corner shops, ranks of shops, car salesrooms etc);
 - noticeboards in waiting rooms at stations, doctors' and dentists' surgeries etc.
9. Costs, pros and cons of the different communication channels are shown in the table on page 4. Not all options need involve significant costs. Some may be free, for example coverage in local radio and newspapers of crime prevention measures that might be taken or police operations being undertaken. In addition, at little cost, CDRPs/CSPs might encourage the use of Home Office⁶ and Tenants' Participation Advisory Service⁷ initiatives aimed at tenants' and residents' groups communicating their own vehicle crime prevention messages, making use of a wide range

of material available to download from Home Office's crime reduction website.⁸ In all cases, however, CDRPs/ CSPs should involve local police in planning crime prevention communications activity to ensure messages are appropriately balanced.

10. Means of communications which are worth considering include:

- Leafleting, using free Home Office material and other more locally-specific materials;
- Door-to-door information distribution
- Roadshows in high profile locations;
- Pay-and-display messaging
- Closed-circuit TV screens in popular locations
- Talking signs.

11. Examples of CDRPs/CSPs successfully tying in combinations of communications activity with prevention and detection methods are shown on pages 12 to 15.

12. Hotspots varied widely; for some CDRPs/ CSPs they were transient, moving with those committing crimes, for others they were static, focussed on the streets in areas where vulnerable vehicles tend to be left. As such, the key message here is to tackle hotspots with a combined focus on both perpetrators (especially persistent offenders) and the public.



Good practice examples

Raising public awareness and warning perpetrators through high profile roadshows

A Welsh Partnership carries out three 'Most Wanted Days' over the summer, targeting theft of and from vehicles in the area, involving the Police, Fire Authority, Neighbourhood Watch, RAC, and specialist vehicle companies. The Partnership bases itself in retail car parks, giving prevention of theft advice. Owners of the prime category vehicles go into a prize draw for a steering lock. Many partnerships holding regular roadshows stress the importance of 'freebies' in order to capture the public's attention; the importance of publicity is also stressed (posters, media campaigns) in raising awareness of such days.

Raising public awareness and warning perpetrators through a combined leafleting and sting car operation

A London CDRP found a novel use for leaflets, using them to publicise a sting car operation in a new hotspot created by two offenders circling the area on pushbikes. A sting car was deployed in the area, and leaflets saying 'Are you about to break into a police car?' placed on the windscreens of 2,000 cars in the vicinity. The initiative involved the police, the local authority and car park attendants over the period of a month, by the end of which, the offenders had left the area.

Intensive multi-agency initiative using a combination of different methods

A CDRP in the South of England instigated a targeted 12-day campaign involving police personnel, PCSOs and other Partnership members undertaking a combination of planned initiatives (different each day) including leafleting, door-knocking vulnerable households, patrols of public places to give on the spot advice to the public, visits to car dealers to secure their help in information distribution, advice in local press. The initiative cost little more than time in lieu. During the operation, 18 'theft from' offences were recorded, against 35 in the previous comparable period.

Multi-agency initiative to tackle property left on display in vehicles

A South West Partnership instigated a 'Vulnerable Vehicle' scheme, replicating the national DVLA/ Home Office scheme which finished in 2006. Parking attendants and PCSOs patrolled the main streets in the town, identifying vehicles with property left on display. They informed the police who then co-ordinated mailings to the registered keepers informing them that the vehicle had been left vulnerable to crime. When 'blitzing' an area, literature was left on the windscreens of all vehicles (not just those identified as vulnerable). A positive outcome of this scheme has been reduced fear of crime in the community. The Partnership stresses the importance of buy-in from partners and rapid turnaround of mailings in order for the message to be effective.

Involving businesses, sports providers and others

A CDRP in the North West intervened in rising TFMV rates (up 17.6 per cent in 2006) by setting up a carefully planned operation including identification of best practice from other CDRPs, securing of funding streams, and the formation of an action plan for which identified Partnership personnel were accountable. The operation focused on:

- Intelligence: engaging a team of intelligence officers to identify intelligence gaps, hotspots and the top 20 auto criminals;

- Education / prevention: Using the media to raise awareness; Property marking; Creating 'Business Watch'; Work with football team; Letters; Street broadcast;
- Enforcement and prevention: Prevention initiatives on football match days; Focus on top 20 criminals; sting operations; Use of smartwater; Focus on handlers; forensic response.

The CDRP stresses the importance of 'flair and imagination', devising a solution in light of what you know about the problem, the perpetrators and the community. The CDRP has secured a 28.1 per cent reduction in crime since the initiative was established.

Multi-agency approach to tackling theft from vehicles in a retail / cinema complex car park

A Partnership reduced incidents from 142 to 20 to 3 over a three year period, in an initiative involving retailers, the probation service, the local authority, police and radio link personnel: The focus of the messages were intended to reach both car park users, and the thieves operating in the area.

- Cinema adverts and posters were developed, using local rugby celebrities to convey the prevention message;
- A lux sign was deployed in the car park, stating 'thieves operate in this area', and that 'extra police are patrolling';

- A mobile CCTV unit was deployed;
- Trainee probation officers walked around the car park talking to vehicle owners;
- Retailers were also asked to communicate with shoppers, further raising awareness;
- Tri-signs on lampposts were also used to push the message home to car owners.

The Partnership describes the key to success as being the multi-agency approach and the pooling of ideas and resources.

Quick search matrix

Communicating the 'Preventing Theft from Motor Vehicles' message to the public

Initiative	What's involved	Further information and cost (as specified by CDRPs/CSPs)	Cost
Leafletting	Variety of uses including general prevention advice, awareness raising of specific initiatives. Distribution at roadshows, door to door, public places, windscreens, via retailers.	Popular campaigns include Keep it Hidden, Steer Clear of Car Crime etc; More than any other approach, need to be used in combination with other initiatives. Available free from Home Office (www.crimereduction.gov.uk/publicity_catalogue), from Prolog (0870 241 4680), or in Welsh (020 7035 3926).	None
Roadshows	Partnership members staffing a stand in a high profile location, distributing information to car owners. Particularly effective for targeting (a) shoppers and (b) owners of most vulnerable vehicles.	Freebies / gimmicks greatly help (including retail discount vouchers, property marking kits, key fobs, tax disc holders, stickers, pens and prize draws). Consider location depending on who your target is (supermarket shoppers with frozen goods may not want to stop and chat; DIY stores are good for catchment of older males; retail and leisure parks for younger males) Low cost: many CDRPs/CSPs report that stores will offer space for free; leaflets are free from Home Office or incur nominal printing costs if locally produced. Costs of items to give away can be reduced by buying in bulk / securing support of retailers / service providers to offer items free / at discounted cost.	None\Low

Initiative	What's involved	Further information and cost (as specified by CDRPs/CSPs)	Cost
Door to door information distribution	PCSOs / officers / crime prevention teams going to residential areas which are being targeted for TFMV, to raise awareness and offer prevention advice	Intensive but effective; evidence that the public continue to spread the message; "A uniform works wonders"; Intelligence from the public can be useful; Low cost if scheduled in standard working hours of personnel.	Low
Pay / display ticket messaging	Putting a 'don't leave anything in your car' message on the sticky part of pay and display messages.	Cost approximately £300 for 15,000 tickets; Useful for communication with out of borough car owners; Limited impact. Needs to be used alongside other measures, not in isolation.	Low
DVLA Mailings	Using DVLA data to send vehicle crime prevention advice to vulnerable vehicle owners, such as those who have left valuable items on view, or whose cars have a low security rating on the Car Theft Index	This requires Police involvement in order to obtain the DVLA data. Letters or leaflets can be mailed directly to the homes of owners of vulnerable vehicles. Vulnerable vehicles can be defined by referring to the Car Theft Index, published by the Home Office.	Low

Initiative	What's involved	Further information and cost (as specified by CDRPs/CSPs)	Cost
Talking signs	Solar powered talking signs distributed around a hotspot; movement nearby triggers a recorded message	Shown to be effective in college and hospital car parks, near ticket machines (movement of the person buying a ticket activates the message); High profile for community reassurance; Cost in the region of £300 each. Message can be changed, signs can be repositioned, solar powering reduces need for expensive (stealable) batteries.	Low\Med
Community safety TV screens	TV screens placed in popular local places	Effective at increasing awareness. Good locations include supermarkets, leisure centres, GP surgeries; Play a 30 minute loop of national and local safety footage; Long term investment - 10 screens cost approx £150K; Useful for other Partners (eg health messages)	High

Useful websites for sources of further information

- [http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime-victims/reducing-crime/vehicle-crime/;](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime-victims/reducing-crime/vehicle-crime/)
- [http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits/vc00.htm;](http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits/vc00.htm)
- http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/vc_index.htm
- <http://www.community-safety.net>
- <http://www.safer-community.net/>
- <http://www.saferparking.com/>

Endnotes

- 1 Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, HC 183, Session 2004-05, January 2005
- 2 The British Crime Survey is a sample survey of approximately 47,000 households conducted annually. This provides a self-reported measure of victimisation, which is used to estimate the total level of crime nationally – both that reported to the police and that which is unreported.
- 3 Based on research from 40 CDRPs (paragraph 1)
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- 5 See Barthe, E. (2004) 'Publicity and Car Crime Prevention' in M. Maxwell and R.V. Clarke (ed) *Understanding and preventing car theft*. Crime Prevention Studies, Vol 17. Cullompton, Willan Publishing
- 6 Home Office Vehicle Crime reduction website – www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime-victims/reducing-crime/vehicle-crime/
- 7 Tenant Participation Advisory Service website – www.tpas.org.uk
- 8 www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/publicity-catalogue

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Feedback

Please let us know whether or not you have found this guide helpful. You can let us have your thoughts via our website – www.nao.org.uk/vehiclecrimecomms

If you have any queries about this leaflet, or wish to discuss our work further please contact:

Jo James – Audit Manager
Jo.James@nao.gsi.gov.uk



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